

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – IV Issue - V (September-October) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



## LAND TENURE, FEDERALISM AND AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENT IN NIGERIA: A POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS, 2015–2025

**OSINOWO TIMOTHY**

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY, KEFFI, NIGERIA

| **Received:** 13.10.2026 | **Accepted:** 17.10.2026 | **Published:** 22.10.2026

**\*Corresponding author:** OSINOWO TIMOTHY

### Abstract

*Land tenure and federal governance remain important institutional determinants of agricultural investment in Nigeria. Despite the strategic importance of agriculture to employment, food security and rural livelihoods, farmers and agricultural investors continue to encounter challenges associated with insecure land rights, fragmented holdings, administrative delays, competing land claims and inadequate institutional coordination. This article examines the relationship between land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025, focusing on the political and institutional arrangements that shape access to land and incentives for long-term investment. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis of recent academic studies, government policies and institutional reports published between 2015 and 2026. Political economy theory provides the analytical framework for explaining how power relations, institutional discretion and unequal access to resources influence land administration and agricultural development. The reviewed evidence indicates that formal land titles can improve agricultural investment incentives and production outcomes, although titling alone cannot overcome constraints associated with credit, infrastructure, insecurity and weak administrative institutions. The article argues that Nigeria's federal structure creates both opportunities for locally responsive land governance and challenges arising from inconsistent administrative practices and coordination difficulties. It recommends transparent land administration, accessible registration systems, stronger recognition of legitimate customary interests, improved intergovernmental coordination and safeguards against arbitrary land acquisition. These reforms are essential for creating a more inclusive and predictable environment for agricultural investment and sustainable rural development.*

**Keywords:** Land tenure, federalism, agricultural investment, political economy, land administration, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Agriculture remains central to Nigeria's economic diversification, employment generation, rural livelihoods and food security. Its development, however, depends not only on access to finance, improved seeds, machinery and markets but also on farmers' ability to obtain and retain access to productive land. Land provides the physical foundation for cultivation, irrigation, livestock production, agroforestry and agricultural processing. Where land rights are uncertain or difficult to enforce, farmers may be reluctant to undertake investments whose benefits emerge only after several production seasons. Recent empirical research on Nigerian farming households demonstrates that land tenure arrangements are associated with agricultural investment decisions, production outcomes and household food security (Adeyemo & Adeagbo, 2024; Olagunju et al., 2023).

The relationship between land tenure and agricultural investment becomes more complicated when examined within Nigeria's federal structure. Land administration operates through statutory institutions, state governments, local governments, customary authorities and community-level arrangements. Although the Land Use Act provides the central legal framework, its implementation depends substantially on state and local institutions, while customary practices continue to influence access to land in many rural communities. This interaction between formal law and established social arrangements creates opportunities for locally grounded land management but may also produce overlapping claims, documentation difficulties and uncertainty over the recognition and transfer of land rights (Bokani, 2024; Historical institutionalism, political settlement and land ownership system in Nigeria, 2025).

These institutional questions have direct implications for investment. Smallholder farmers may need secure access to land before committing resources to irrigation, soil improvement, tree crops, mechanisation and other long-term improvements. Commercial investors similarly require predictable procedures for land acquisition, registration, transfer and dispute resolution. Yet formal documentation can be expensive or inaccessible, and possession of a certificate does not automatically guarantee affordable credit, adequate infrastructure or protection from insecurity. Evidence from Nigeria suggests that land titling can improve production and food security outcomes, while research on conflict shows that insecurity can reduce agricultural investment and influence farmers' crop choices (Adeyemo & Adeagbo, 2024; Conflicts, crop choice, and agricultural investments, 2025).

The central argument of this article is that agricultural investment in Nigeria is shaped by the interaction between land tenure arrangements, federal institutional relationships and unequal power over land allocation and use. The problem is therefore not simply a shortage of land or inadequate investment capital; it also concerns how land rights are recognised, administered and protected. The article examines this relationship during 2015–2025 and proposes reforms aimed at improving tenure security, strengthening institutional accountability and promoting inclusive agricultural development.

## Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's land governance framework seeks to regulate land allocation and use while accommodating public development objectives and the interests of individual landholders and

communities. In practice, however, the coexistence of statutory rights, customary claims and informal arrangements can complicate agricultural land acquisition and investment planning. Farmers who lack accessible documentation may face difficulties proving their claims, negotiating leases or satisfying lenders' requirements. Investors may also encounter delays in obtaining approvals or resolving competing claims. These problems can increase transaction costs and reduce the predictability required for long-term agricultural investment (Bokani, 2024; Okonkwo, 2015).

The federal dimension introduces a further institutional challenge. State governments exercise substantial authority over land administration, while local governments have statutory responsibilities concerning certain rural lands and customary rights of occupancy. Customary institutions also remain influential in many communities. When the responsibilities of these actors are poorly coordinated, the result may be uncertainty over procedures, competing expectations and uneven implementation across states. Nevertheless, decentralised administration is not inherently ineffective: state and local institutions may be better positioned to understand local landholding practices and resolve disputes when they operate transparently and accountably.

The problem addressed in this article is therefore how Nigeria can reconcile public authority over land with secure and equitable access for farmers, customary landholders and agricultural investors. It also asks how federalism can support rather than obstruct agricultural investment, particularly where institutional fragmentation, insecurity and unequal bargaining power affect land access.

## Objectives of the Study

The broad objective is to examine the relationship between land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the relationship between land tenure arrangements and agricultural investment in Nigeria.
- ii. Analyse how Nigeria's federal structure shapes land administration and access to agricultural land.
- iii. Assess the implications of tenure insecurity, administrative barriers and competing land claims for agricultural investment.
- iv. Explain how political and institutional power relations influence access to land and agricultural development.
- v. Recommend institutional and policy reforms for improving tenure security and promoting inclusive agricultural investment.

## Research Questions

- i. How do land tenure arrangements influence agricultural investment in Nigeria?
- ii. How does federalism shape land administration and access to agricultural land?
- iii. What implications do tenure insecurity and administrative barriers have for agricultural investment?

- iv. How do power relations and institutional arrangements influence the distribution and use of agricultural land?
- v. What reforms can improve tenure security and encourage sustainable agricultural investment?

## Conceptual Review

### Land Tenure

Land tenure refers to the institutional and social arrangements through which individuals, households, communities and organisations obtain, use, transfer and retain rights over land. These arrangements determine who may cultivate a plot, inherit it, lease it, transfer specified interests or challenge another person's claim. In Nigeria, statutory land administration coexists with customary practices that continue to influence access to land, particularly in rural areas. The relationship between these arrangements affects the documentation, recognition and practical enforcement of land rights (Bokani, 2024; Historical institutionalism, political settlement and land ownership system in Nigeria, 2025).

Tenure security concerns the extent to which landholders believe their rights are recognised and protected against arbitrary loss or competing claims. It is not identical to formal ownership or possession of a certificate of occupancy. A farmer may have a recognised customary claim without formal documentation, while a formally documented right may still be affected by unresolved disputes, administrative weaknesses or insecurity. For agricultural investment, the critical consideration is whether farmers can reasonably expect to benefit from improvements made to the land.

### Federalism

Federalism is a system of government in which public authority is constitutionally distributed between central and subnational governments. In Nigeria, the federal structure provides a framework for distributing responsibilities for agriculture, infrastructure, rural development and land administration. Land governance, however, has a distinctive institutional character because the Land Use Act assigns important administrative powers to state governors and responsibilities concerning certain rural lands to local governments.

The relationship between federalism and land administration is therefore not limited to the constitutional division of powers. It also concerns coordination between government levels, consistency in administrative procedures, the capacity of land institutions and accountability in the exercise of public authority. Bokani (2024) identifies tensions in the relationship between the constitutional framework and the Land Use Act, illustrating how legal arrangements can complicate the practical distribution of authority.

### Agricultural Investment

Agricultural investment refers to the allocation of financial, physical and human resources to improve agricultural production, productivity and profitability. It includes irrigation, farm machinery, improved planting materials, soil conservation, storage facilities, livestock infrastructure, agroforestry and other improvements to agricultural land. Some investments generate benefits within one production cycle, while others require several years before returns are realised.

Tenure security matters because the expected duration and reliability of access to land influence the willingness of farmers to make long-term improvements. Olagunju et al. (2023) found that land ownership was associated with higher expected maize yields and reduced production risk among Nigerian small-scale farmers. Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) likewise reported a positive relationship between land titling, production output and household food expenditure. These findings support the importance of secure rights, although they do not establish that formal titling alone can resolve every constraint facing agricultural investors.

### Empirical Review

Besley (1995) examined the relationship between property rights and investment incentives, arguing that secure land rights encourage investment by reducing uncertainty and protecting expected returns. Deininger and Feder (2001) similarly established that effective land institutions can promote agricultural productivity by improving tenure security and facilitating access to credit. Olagunju et al. (2023), using evidence from 1,820 Nigerian maize farmers, associated land ownership with higher expected yields and lower production risks. We observe that secure land rights can encourage agricultural investment, although their benefits depend on access to complementary resources and effective institutions.

Feder and Nishio (1999) reviewed evidence on land registration and titling, identifying potential benefits for investment, credit access and land transactions. Lawry et al. (2017), in a systematic review of land-property-rights interventions in developing countries, found that tenure reforms can improve agricultural investment and productivity, although outcomes vary across contexts. Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) similarly reported positive associations between land titling, agricultural output and household food expenditure. We note that formal titles do not automatically translate into productive investment when farmers face credit constraints, high registration costs and inadequate infrastructure.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2012) emphasised transparent, equitable and accountable land governance through its voluntary guidelines on tenure. The FAO (2015) also highlighted the importance of responsible agricultural investment that respects the land rights and livelihoods of local communities. These perspectives demonstrate that land governance involves not only ownership documentation but also the protection of vulnerable groups. We argue that agricultural investment policies should balance commercial interests with the tenure rights and livelihood security of smallholder farmers.

North (2005) explained that institutions shape economic performance by establishing the rules and incentives governing human interaction. Applied to land administration, this perspective suggests that predictable regulations, effective enforcement and transparent dispute-resolution mechanisms can reduce uncertainty and encourage agricultural investment. We observe that weak institutional enforcement may undermine the benefits of formal land rights, even where appropriate laws exist.

Holden and Ghebru (2016) examined the relationship between land tenure reforms, tenure security and food security in poor agrarian economies. They highlighted the importance of tenure security and the need to understand how land policies affect different categories of landholders. We argue that land reforms must account for the circumstances of smallholder farmers and rural communities to

promote equitable access to land and sustainable agricultural investment.

Bellemare (2013) investigated the productivity implications of formal and informal land rights in Madagascar, demonstrating the importance of examining how land-rights arrangements relate to agricultural outcomes. Although the study focuses on a different national context, it provides a useful comparative perspective for understanding the relationship between tenure institutions and agricultural productivity. We observe that the effectiveness of land rights depends on the institutional and economic conditions under which farmers access and utilise land.

Bokani (2024) examined tensions between Nigeria's constitutional framework and the Land Use Act of 1978, particularly regarding the distribution of authority over land administration. Tan (2025) similarly highlighted the influence of historical institutions and political settlements on the persistence of statutory and customary tenure systems. Under the Land Use Act, land in each state is vested in the governor to be held in trust for the people, making administrative decisions central to land access and use. We argue that overlapping responsibilities, administrative discretion and unequal political influence can create uncertainty for agricultural investors and constrain the effective implementation of land policies.

Amare et al. (2025) demonstrated that conflict exposure influences crop choices, cultivated areas and agricultural investment decisions in Nigeria. Okonkwo (2015), examining the management, revocation and compensation principles of the Land Use Act, highlighted important concerns surrounding land administration and the protection of land interests. We observe that insecurity, competing land claims, complicated registration procedures and inadequate compensation can discourage long-term investment, particularly among smallholder farmers whose interests may be inadequately protected.

Despite these contributions, existing literature often examines land tenure security, federalism, agricultural investment and political power as separate issues. This article addresses the gap by examining how these factors interact within Nigeria's political economy between 2015 and 2025. We argue that understanding the interaction between legal arrangements, administrative practices, insecurity and unequal access to resources is essential for explaining the limitations of land governance and identifying pathways towards more inclusive agricultural development.

### Theoretical Framework

This article adopts Political Economy Theory as its analytical framework. Political economy examines how economic outcomes are shaped by power relations, institutions, political interests and the distribution of resources. Applied to land governance, it directs attention beyond the technical administration of property rights to the question of who controls access to land, whose claims are recognised and how public authority is exercised.

The theory is relevant to Nigeria because land is simultaneously an economic resource, a source of livelihood, a basis of community identity and an instrument of political authority. Decisions concerning allocation, registration, compulsory acquisition and land-use conversion can therefore produce different outcomes for smallholder farmers, customary landholders, commercial investors and public institutions. Where administrative discretion is not accompanied by transparent procedures and effective

accountability, individuals with greater financial or political influence may be better positioned to navigate the land system.

The framework also helps explain why the effects of land reform may be uneven. Formal registration can improve the recognition of land rights, but its benefits depend on affordability, accessible procedures, effective dispute resolution and protection against arbitrary interference. A reform that prioritises formal documentation without protecting legitimate customary interests may exclude vulnerable landholders rather than strengthen tenure security. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2015) emphasises responsible governance of tenure and safeguards for legitimate land rights in the context of agricultural investment.

The application of political economy theory to this study is therefore threefold. First, it explains how power and institutional discretion influence access to agricultural land. Second, it highlights the relationship between federal authority, state-level implementation and community-level land governance. Third, it provides a basis for assessing whether land reforms distribute investment opportunities broadly or reinforce existing inequalities. The framework does not assume that all land allocation is politically motivated; rather, it treats accountability, bargaining power and institutional incentives as issues requiring systematic examination.

### Research Methodology

The article adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis. It examines academic journal articles, government policy documents and institutional publications relevant to land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria. The review focuses on sources published between 2015 and 2026, while the period under investigation is 2015–2025. The inclusion of 2026 publications is intended to incorporate recent assessments of developments during the study period rather than extend the period of analysis.

Documents were examined thematically under four broad categories: land rights and tenure security; federal and subnational land administration; agricultural investment and production outcomes; and political economy, institutional accountability and land-related conflict. The analysis compares the arguments and findings of the selected sources to identify recurring relationships, institutional tensions and policy implications.

The study relies on secondary evidence and does not claim to have conducted original fieldwork, interviews or statistical hypothesis testing. Its conclusions are analytical rather than causal estimates of the independent effect of federalism on agricultural investment. The available literature provides evidence on specific relationships, including land titling and farm outcomes, but further comparative research across Nigeria's states would be required to establish how differences in land administration affect investment over time.

### Findings and Results

The findings are based on a qualitative analysis of academic studies, policy documents and institutional publications relating to land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. The discussion is organised according to the five research objectives. Since the study relies on secondary data, the findings represent a thematic interpretation of existing evidence rather than results from original fieldwork.

**The Relationship between Land Tenure Arrangements and Agricultural Investment in Nigeria**

The land tenure arrangements influence agricultural investment in Nigeria. The reviewed evidence indicates that tenure security is an important consideration in farmers’ investment decisions, particularly where agricultural activities require long-term commitments. Investments in irrigation, mechanisation, soil improvement and perennial crops depend partly on the farmer’s expectation of retaining access to the land long enough to benefit from the returns.

Olagunju et al. (2023), using data from 1,820 Nigerian maize farmers, found that land ownership was associated with higher expected yields and lower production risk. Similarly, Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) reported a positive relationship between formal land titling, agricultural production output and household food expenditure. These findings suggest that secure land rights can improve the conditions for agricultural investment, although the results do not establish that formal titles alone guarantee higher investment or productivity.

**Table 1: Evidence on Land Tenure and Agricultural Investment in Nigeria**

| Study                      | Reported finding                                                                              | Implication                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Olagunju et al. (2023)     | Land ownership was associated with higher expected maize yields and lower production risk.    | Secure access to land may strengthen investment incentives and production stability.                                           |
| Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) | Land titling was positively associated with production output and household food expenditure. | Accessible documentation may support agricultural performance and household welfare.                                           |
| Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) | Approximately 12% of agricultural landholding observations in the study had formal titles.    | Formal registration may be limited within the study population, highlighting the importance of accessible land administration. |

**Source:** Olagunju et al. (2023); Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024).

The table indicates that land tenure is relevant to agricultural investment through its relationship with expected returns, production risk and the ability to establish recognised rights. However, the limited prevalence of formal titles reported by Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) should not be interpreted as evidence that all other landholders lacked secure customary rights. The finding supports a broader approach that improves the security of legitimate land interests while addressing complementary constraints such as credit, infrastructure and market access.

**How Nigeria’s Federal Structure Shapes Land Administration and Access to Agricultural Land**

The second objective examined the influence of federalism on land administration and access to agricultural land. The findings show

that Nigeria’s land governance system involves statutory institutions, state and local governments, and customary authorities. The Land Use Act establishes the central legal framework, while its implementation depends substantially on the institutions responsible for allocating, documenting and administering land rights.

Bokani (2024) identifies tensions between the Land Use Act and Nigeria’s constitutional framework concerning the distribution of authority. These institutional relationships are relevant to agricultural investment because farmers and investors require predictable procedures for securing land, obtaining necessary approvals and resolving competing claims.

**Table 2: Federal Institutional Arrangements and Agricultural Land Governance**

| Institutional actor                  | Relevant responsibility                                                                     | Implication for agricultural investment                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Federal government                   | National agricultural policy, research, technology and agricultural development programmes  | Provides policy direction and supports investment in agricultural infrastructure and services.                      |
| State governments                    | Administration of statutory rights of occupancy and urban land under the Land Use Act       | Administrative efficiency and transparency influence the predictability of land transactions.                       |
| Local governments                    | Statutory responsibilities concerning customary rights of occupancy and certain rural lands | Effective local administration can facilitate access to land records and community-level dispute resolution.        |
| Customary and community institutions | Customary allocation, inheritance and locally recognised landholding arrangements           | Recognition of legitimate customary rights can support land access, while unresolved claims may create uncertainty. |

**Source:** Author’s analysis of the Land Use Act framework and Bokani (2024).

The findings suggest that federalism creates both opportunities and challenges for agricultural land administration. State and local institutions can respond to local conditions, but differences in capacity, administrative practices and accountability may create

unequal experiences for landholders and investors. The evidence does not establish that federalism itself necessarily discourages investment; rather, the implications depend on how responsibilities are exercised and coordinated.

The result supports the need for clearer administrative procedures, effective intergovernmental coordination and safeguards against arbitrary decisions. Such measures would help ensure that the distribution of authority under Nigeria’s federal structure contributes to secure land access and agricultural development.

**The Implications of Tenure Insecurity, Administrative Barriers and Competing Land Claims for Agricultural Investment**

The third objective examined the implications of tenure insecurity, administrative barriers and competing land claims. The findings indicate that unclear documentation, disputed boundaries, lengthy administrative processes and uncertainty over continued access to land can undermine investment planning. These challenges are particularly relevant to activities that require substantial initial expenditure and generate returns over several years.

Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) demonstrate the relevance of land titling to agricultural outcomes, while Amare et al. (2025) show that conflict exposure affects farmers’ crop choices and agricultural investment. Taken together, these findings suggest that land documentation and physical security are complementary conditions for sustained agricultural investment.

**Table 3: Tenure-Related Constraints and Their Investment Implications**

| Constraint                                    | Potential implication for agricultural investment                             |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Inadequate land documentation                 | Difficulty proving land rights or completing formal transactions.             |
| Uncertain duration of land access             | Reduced willingness to undertake long-term farm improvements.                 |
| High registration and transaction costs       | Increased barriers to formalising land rights, particularly for smallholders. |
| Competing land claims and unresolved disputes | Delays, additional costs and uncertainty over investment returns.             |
| Insecurity and displacement                   | Disruption of cultivation and reduced incentives for long-term investments.   |

|                                             |                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Limited access to credit and infrastructure | Reduced capacity to translate secure land rights into productive investment. |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Source:** Author’s thematic analysis based on Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024), Olagunju et al. (2023) and Amare et al. (2025).

The table shows that tenure insecurity affects investment through several connected mechanisms. Farmers may be reluctant to invest in permanent improvements where their rights are uncertain, while unresolved disputes and insecurity may disrupt even activities conducted on formally documented land. However, the effects vary according to local institutions, the nature of the investment and the availability of complementary resources.

The findings therefore indicate that land registration alone is insufficient. Accessible dispute resolution, transparent acquisition procedures, protection of legitimate rights and effective conflict prevention are also necessary. Agricultural finance and infrastructure must be addressed alongside these measures to improve the likelihood that secure land access will translate into productive investment.

**How Political and Institutional Power Relations Influence Access to Land and Agricultural Development**

The fourth objective examined how political and institutional power relations influence access to land. The findings suggest that land governance is not merely an administrative process; it also determines who can access productive resources, whose claims receive recognition and how competing interests are managed.

Under the Land Use Act, state governors exercise significant authority over statutory rights of occupancy and urban land administration. These powers can support planned development and coordinated land use. However, where administrative decisions are not transparent or affected parties lack effective avenues for appeal, unequal bargaining power may influence the practical ability of farmers and investors to secure land.

Bokani (2024) highlights institutional tensions in Nigeria’s land governance framework. From a political economy perspective, these tensions make accountability, procedural fairness and the protection of legitimate rights important conditions for effective land administration.

**Table 4: Political Economy Dimensions of Land Governance**

| Dimension                               | Potential effect on access to land                                                       | Institutional implication                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Administrative discretion               | Unpredictable decisions may increase uncertainty for landholders and investors.          | Publish clear allocation criteria and processing timelines.                |
| Unequal bargaining power                | Smallholders and less-resourced groups may find it harder to navigate formal procedures. | Provide accessible registration, information and legal support.            |
| Recognition of customary rights         | Failure to recognise legitimate claims may create disputes or exclusion.                 | Incorporate customary interests into transparent documentation procedures. |
| Accountability in land allocation       | Weak oversight may undermine confidence in land administration.                          | Strengthen review, grievance and appeal mechanisms.                        |
| Public and private land-use competition | Competing development interests may displace existing land users.                        | Ensure consultation, fair procedures and appropriate compensation.         |

**Source:** Author’s political economy interpretation of the land governance issues discussed by Bokani (2024).

The findings support the argument that institutional power affects the distribution of agricultural opportunities. Nevertheless, the analysis does not establish that land allocation decisions are routinely determined by political favouritism or that every exercise of administrative discretion is improper. Rather, it identifies the institutional risks that arise when decision-making lacks transparency and accountability.

The implication is that land governance reforms should seek to balance public development objectives with the protection of legitimate land rights. Fair allocation procedures, accessible appeals and transparent compensation arrangements would improve confidence in land administration and help prevent the concentration of investment opportunities among those with greater political or financial influence.

## Institutional and Policy Reforms for Improving Tenure Security and Promoting Inclusive Agricultural Investment

The fifth objective focused on the reforms needed to improve tenure security and agricultural investment. The findings indicate that effective reform must go beyond issuing formal titles. It should address the administrative, financial, infrastructural and security conditions that determine whether farmers and investors can use land productively.

Nigeria's National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy 2022–2027 emphasises agricultural technology, mechanisation, infrastructure and institutional coordination (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [FMARD], 2022). These priorities reinforce the need to integrate land governance with broader agricultural development programmes.

**Table 5: Proposed Reforms Based on the Research Findings**

| Identified issue                                | Recommended reform                                                                   | Expected contribution                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Difficult and costly land registration          | Simplify procedures and make fees transparent and affordable.                        | Improve access to formal documentation.                           |
| Inadequate recognition of customary rights      | Document and protect legitimate customary interests.                                 | Reduce exclusion and competing claims.                            |
| Weak coordination among government institutions | Clarify responsibilities and improve information sharing.                            | Reduce duplication and administrative uncertainty.                |
| Limited access to agricultural finance          | Expand suitable credit facilities and alternative financing mechanisms.              | Enable farmers to invest in machinery and long-term improvements. |
| Land disputes and insecurity                    | Strengthen mediation, dispute resolution and rural security.                         | Reduce disruption and improve investment confidence.              |
| Unequal access to land administration           | Improve public information, consultation and grievance procedures.                   | Promote inclusive and accountable land governance.                |
| Inadequate agricultural infrastructure          | Coordinate land-use planning with roads, irrigation, storage and extension services. | Improve the productivity of land and complementary investments.   |

**Source:** Author's recommendations derived from the documentary findings.

The results suggest that land governance reform should combine secure tenure with accessible public institutions and complementary agricultural support. Simplifying registration without recognising customary claims may exclude legitimate landholders, while issuing titles without improving access to finance and infrastructure may produce limited investment gains.

Similarly, decentralised administration will only support agricultural investment where state and local institutions have the capacity and incentives to implement transparent procedures. Reforms should therefore include measurable indicators, such as registration costs, processing times, dispute-resolution outcomes and the extent to which smallholders can access agricultural finance.

## Discussion of Findings

The reviewed literature reveals four major findings concerning the relationship between land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria.

First, secure land rights are an important condition for long-term agricultural investment. Evidence from Adeyemo and Adeagbo (2024) and Olagunju et al. (2023) indicates that land titling and ownership are associated with improved agricultural outcomes.

These findings suggest that farmers are more likely to consider investments when they have confidence in their ability to continue using the land and benefit from improvements. However, formal titles should not be treated as a universal solution because investment also depends on access to finance, infrastructure, technology and markets.

Second, Nigeria's land governance system reflects the interaction between formal institutions and customary arrangements. Tan (2025) demonstrates that historical power relations and institutional layering have contributed to the persistence of statutory and customary land governance arrangements. This finding supports the argument that land reform cannot succeed through legal changes alone. Effective implementation requires institutions that understand local landholding practices while ensuring that legitimate rights are recognised and protected.

Third, federalism creates both opportunities and institutional challenges for land administration. State and local institutions can respond to local conditions, but differences in administrative capacity, procedures and accountability may produce unequal experiences for farmers and investors. The analysis suggests that the effects of federalism depend less on decentralisation itself than on how responsibilities are coordinated and how public powers are

exercised. This interpretation is consistent with the institutional tensions identified by Bokani (2024).

Fourth, insecurity and competing land-use demands weaken the investment benefits of secure tenure. Amare et al. (2025) find that violent conflict is associated with reduced cultivated and harvested areas and changes in farmers' crop choices and investment decisions. These findings demonstrate that formal land rights cannot guarantee productive investment where violence or displacement threatens access to farmland.

Taken together, the evidence supports a political economy explanation of agricultural investment in Nigeria. Land governance affects investment not only through legal rights but also through administrative costs, bargaining power, security and access to complementary resources. Consequently, reforms should address the interaction between tenure security, institutional coordination and broader agricultural development rather than focus exclusively on land registration.

## Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between land tenure, federalism and agricultural investment in Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. The analysis demonstrates that land is not merely a productive resource; it is also an institutional and political asset whose allocation and use are shaped by statutory rules, customary arrangements, administrative authority and unequal bargaining power. These relationships influence the confidence with which farmers and investors undertake long-term agricultural activities.

The reviewed evidence indicates that secure land rights can support agricultural investment and improve production outcomes. Nevertheless, formal land titles alone cannot resolve the challenges associated with limited credit, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, weak institutional capacity and competing land-use demands. Similarly, Nigeria's federal structure can support locally responsive governance, but its benefits depend on effective coordination, transparent procedures and accountability across government levels.

The central conclusion is that agricultural investment requires a land governance system that combines legal clarity with institutional effectiveness and social inclusion. Reform should improve access to registration, protect legitimate customary interests, clarify administrative responsibilities and strengthen mechanisms for resolving disputes. These measures should be integrated with agricultural finance, rural infrastructure, technology and conflict prevention.

Ultimately, Nigeria's capacity to attract sustained agricultural investment will depend not simply on the availability of land but on whether farmers and investors can obtain secure, predictable and equitable access to it. A more accountable and coordinated land governance framework would provide a stronger institutional foundation for agricultural productivity, rural livelihoods and sustainable development.

## Policy Recommendations

The federal and state governments should reform land administration to make registration more accessible, affordable and transparent. Procedures for documenting statutory and legitimate customary land interests should be simplified, with clear requirements, reasonable processing timelines and accessible mechanisms for correcting errors. Digital land records should be

supported by field verification, public access safeguards and effective dispute-resolution procedures. Reforms should also protect legitimate landholders against arbitrary revocation and ensure fair, transparent compensation where applicable. The objective should be to strengthen tenure security without excluding farmers whose rights are recognised under customary arrangements.

Intergovernmental coordination should be strengthened through clearer operational arrangements among federal, state and local governments. These arrangements should clarify institutional responsibilities, improve land-information sharing and provide mechanisms for resolving overlapping claims. National agricultural policies should be aligned with state land-use plans, rural infrastructure programmes and local agricultural priorities. The National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy 2022–2027 provides a useful framework for connecting agricultural technology, research, infrastructure and institutional coordination (FMARD, 2022). Its implementation should also address land governance barriers that prevent farmers and agricultural enterprises from benefiting fully from public investment.

Improving access to agricultural finance requires complementary measures beyond land registration. Financial institutions should consider credible evidence of land-use rights, subject to applicable legal requirements and appropriate safeguards, while developing credit products that reflect seasonal agricultural income and investment cycles. Credit guarantees, cooperative lending, equipment leasing, warehouse-receipt arrangements where appropriate, and value-chain financing can reduce smallholders' dependence on titled land as collateral. Such mechanisms would help address the financial constraints that formalisation alone cannot resolve.

Land reforms should protect legitimate customary rights and promote inclusive access to agricultural land. Community participation should be incorporated into registration, land-use planning and agricultural investment decisions, particularly where large-scale acquisitions or changes in land use may affect existing livelihoods. Women, young farmers and other groups whose access to land depends on inheritance, family arrangements or community decisions should receive particular attention. Transparent procedures, accessible legal support and effective grievance mechanisms can help ensure that formalisation strengthens existing rights rather than transferring advantages to wealthier individuals.

Governments should integrate land governance with conflict prevention by strengthening mechanisms for resolving disputes involving farm boundaries, inheritance, leases, land acquisition and competing agricultural uses. Mediation should be supported by reliable land records and clear legal procedures, while threats to life and property require appropriate security responses. Land-use planning should recognise the legitimate interests of crop farmers, pastoral communities and other land users. Predictable rules, meaningful consultation and credible dispute resolution can reduce avoidable conflicts and improve confidence in agricultural investment, complementing rather than replacing broader security interventions.

Finally, government agencies should establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to determine whether land governance reforms improve agricultural investment outcomes. Relevant indicators should include registration costs and processing times, compliance with published service standards, the resolution of land

disputes, access to agricultural credit, investment in farm improvements and the participation of women and smallholder farmers in formal land arrangements. Monitoring should distinguish between the number of titles issued and the actual security and economic benefits experienced by landholders. Independent evaluations and publicly available state-level results would help identify effective practices, improve accountability and guide future reforms.

## References

1. Adeyemo, T. A., & Adeagbo, A. O. (2024). SDG 2 – ending hunger: The effect of Nigeria’s landtitling on production output and food security of farming households. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 7, Article 1290576. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1290576>
2. Amare, M., Abay, K. A., Berhane, G., Andam, K. S., & Adeyanju, D. (2025). Conflicts, cropchoice, and agricultural investments: Empirical evidence from Nigeria. *Land Use Policy*, 148, Article 107391. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2024.107391>
3. Bellemare, M. F. (2013). The productivity impacts of formal and informal land rights: Evidence from Madagascar. *Land Economics*, 89(2), 272–290. <https://doi.org/10.3368/le.89.2.272>
4. Besley, T. (1995). Property rights and investment incentives: Theory and evidence from Ghana. *Journal of Political Economy*, 103(5), 903–937. <https://doi.org/10.1086/262008>
5. Bokani, A. M. (2024). An analysis of the interplay between the Nigerian Constitution and LandUse Act, 1978: Travesty of Nigerian federalism and constitutionalism? *ABU Law Journal*, 20–38. <https://doi.org/10.67203/abulj.2024.lbpy1xmf>
6. Deininger, K., & Feder, G. (2001). Land institutions and land markets. In B. L. Gardner and G. C. Rausser (Eds.), *Handbook of agricultural economics* (Vol. 1, pp. 287–331). Elsevier. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0072\(01\)10009-土地](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0072(01)10009-土地)
7. Feder, G., & Nishio, A. (1999). The benefits of land registration and titling: Economic and social perspectives. *Land Use Policy*, 16(1), 25–43. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0264-8377\(98\)00039-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0264-8377(98)00039-2)
8. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2022). National agricultural technology and innovation policy (NATIP), 2022–2027. Federal Government of Nigeria. <https://agriculture.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/National-Agricultural-Technology-and-Innovation-Policy-NATIP-2022-2027.pdf>
9. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2012). Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security. <https://www.fao.org/4/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>
10. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2015). Safeguarding land tenure rights in the context of agricultural investment. <https://www.fao.org/3/a-i4998e.pdf>
11. Holden, S. T., & Ghebru, H. (2016). Land tenure reforms, tenure security and food security in poor agrarian economies: Causal linkages and research gaps. *Global Food Security*, 10, 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2016.07.002>
12. Lawry, S., Samii, C., Hall, R., Leopold, A., Hornby, D., & Mtero, F. (2017). The impact of land property rights interventions on investment and agricultural productivity in developing countries: A systematic review. *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 9(1), 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2016.1160947>
13. Okonkwo, E. C. (2015). A closer look at the management, revocation and compensation principles under the Nigerian Land Use Act. *Journal of Sustainable Development Law and Policy*, 1(1), 21–36. <https://jsdlp.ogeesinstitute.edu.ng/jsdlp/article/view/90>
14. Olagunju, K. O., Olagunju, K. A., Ogunniyi, A. I., Omotayo, A. O., & Oyetunde-Usman, Z. (2023). To own or not to own? Land tenure security and production risk in small-scale farming. *Land Use Policy*, 127, Article 106584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2023.106584>
15. Tan, Y. (2025). Historical institutionalism, political settlement and land ownership system in Nigeria. *International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development*, 17(1), 136–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463138.2025.2495580>